United Nations

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ As Srebrenica comes under attack, Secretary-General calls on Serb forces to halt "unjustifiable attack" on the eastern Bosnian town, mounted despite explicite assurances by Bosnian Serb leaders.

+ Secretary-General expresses concern over amnesty law adopted by El Salvador Legislative Assembly.

+ Permanent Observer of Palestine to United Nations draws attention to "dramatic" increase in "repressive measures" taken by Israel against Palestinians in occupied territories; Egypt, on behalf of Arab Group, requests formal meeting of Security Council to consider issue.

+ International Atomic Energy Agency welcomes assurances from South Africa regarding its nuclear programme.

+ About $5 million received at pledging conference at Headquarters for United Nations Programmes for southern Africa.

+ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees says internally displaced Tajiks require emergency assistance.

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As the eastern Bosnian city of Srebrenica came under attack today, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in a statement issued at Headquarters, called on the Serb forces in the area to halt the "unjustifiable attack" which, he said, occurred despite explicite assurances by Bosnian Serb leaders there and in New York. He also urged all concerned to cooperate with the efforts of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) to bring about a cease-fire.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali, while deploring the further casualties among the residents in the suffering town, said he was particularly anxious about the safety of the United Nations military and civilian personnel in and around Srebrenica. Two Canadian soldiers serving with the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) were injured today when artillery fire hit the helipad as

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United Nations helicopters were trying to avacuate wounded residents from the town. The two wounded soldiers were successfully evacuated, but further evacuation flights have been rendered impossible by the shelling.

The Commander of UNPROFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lieutenant-General Philippe Morillion, who is currently in Tuzla, has not been able to return to Srebrenica. Several UNPROFOR military personnel remained at the PTT building in Srebrenica.

Meanwhile, Force Commander Lars-Eric Wahlgren of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) has warned that the use of force to ban military flights over Bosnia and Herzegovina would have "negative consequences" for UNPROFOR there. The Force Commander's observation comes as the Security Council is considering a draft resolution which would allow United Nations Member States to shoot down military aircraft in violation of the "no-fly zone" over Bosnia, instituted by the Council last October.

In a cable to the Secretary-General over the weekend, Mr. Wahlgren said he was particularly concerned that the delivery of humanitarian aid would be seriously jeopardized. He also said he was deeply worried about the safety and security of UNPROFOR's military observers and civilian personnel in locations in the region where they would become vulnerable, for example the air fields.

Commander Wahlgren noted that so far the aerial activity "has had no significant impact on the military situation".

In a related development, Lord Owen, Co-Chairman of the International Conference on former Yugoslavia, met with the Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, this morning, to protest the incident at the evacuation of wounded by helicopter. According to Fred Eckhard, spokesman for the Co-Chairmen, Lord Owen and Cyrus Vance, the other Co-Chairman, would meet with President Alija Izetbegovic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and with Mate Boban, the Bosnian Croat leader, to continue discussions on the latest draft on the interim Government arrangments.

With regard to the talks in Geneva on Krajina, Mr. Eckhard said both parties seemed ready to accept an extension of the mandate of UNPROFOR, which is due to expire at the end of March.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has expressed concern over the adoption by the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador of an amnesty law, saying it would have been better if a broad degree of national consensus had been created in favour of the law.

In a statement issued at Headquarters today, the Secretary-General said that although the adoption of the amnesty law was "an internal matter", it was nevertheless related to the report of the Commission on the Truth which "remains an integral part of the Peace Settlement in El Salvador". Under that

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agreement, both parties in El Salvador were bound to ensure that no action was taken that was "inconsistent" with the recommendations of the Commission on the Truth, he said. Mr. Boutros-Ghali said he looked forward to know when the El Salvador Government would implement all the recommendations of the Commission so that he could inform the Security Council.

The three-member Commission, which submitted its report on El Salvador last week, named individuals from both sides of the conflict -- the Salvadoran Government and the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) -- whom it found responsible for the worst and most widespread violations of human rights between 1980 and July 1991. The armed conflict ended formally in mid-December of last year.

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The Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations , Nasser Al-Kidwa, has asked for a formal meeting of the Security Council to consider the "dramatic" increase in "repressive measures and lethal actions" taken by the Israeli authorities against Palestinians in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem.

In a letter to the Secretary-General, dated 22 March, Mr. Al-Kidwa called for the adoption of "concrete" measures which would provide protection for the Palestinian people, as already demanded by the Council under resolution 681 of 1990. Since last December, some 50 Palestinians, including 17 children, had been killed by Israeli troops or settlers in the Gaza Strip. During the same period, he wrote, nearly 2,000 Palestinian civilians, including over 400 children, were wounded by the troops.

Mr. Al-Kidwa pointed out that the total number of fatalities for the past four months was much higher than that recorded during the first four months of the intifadah in the occupied Palestinian territory. Such Israeli policies and practices, he said, drastically undermined the efforts aimed at achieving peace in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, the Egyptian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Nabil Elaraby, on behalf of the Arab Group, has formally asked for a Council meeting concerning the the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. The request was put forward in a letter to the Security Council President, dated 22 March.

In a separate development, the Secretary-General, following his meetings with the Israeli Prime Minster Yiezhak Rabin last week, has appointed Benon Sevan, Assistant Secretary-General in the Department of Political Affairs, to deal with the question of persons missing in action (MIAs) and prisoners from the Middle East area, including Israeli nationals.
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The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has welcomed the public disclosure of the military part of South Africa's nuclear programme and also its assurances that the relevant facilities, equipment and materials had been destroyed or converted for peaceful use.

According to a press release issued in Vienna today, President F.W. de Klerk told a joint session of the South African Parliament today that his country had worked in the past on a limited number of military nuclear devices, with six of the seven devices having been completed. South Africa had terminated that programme prior to its accession to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in July, 1991, and to the subsequent application of IAEA safeguards inspections there.

The IAEA also welcomed the invitation extended to it by South Africa to send inspectors to sites involved in the "former" programme and to review the historical records. It said it would examine the contents and implications of the statements made by the South African President in the context of its continuing safeguards work in that country, where it has so far conducted over 115 inspections.

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Twenty-four Governments have contributed more than $5 million during a pledging conference held at Headquarters this week in order to assist United Nations Programmes for southern Africa.

The contributions and pledges were received by the Secretary-General during a ceremony which preceeded the observance of the International Day, held annually in memory of the death of peaceful demonstrators who were killed in 1960 in Sharpville, South Africa, protesting against the "pass laws".

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About 8,000 internally displaced Tajiks are in need of emergency assistance after having been forced to return to their war-ravaged province in the former Soviet Republic of Tajikistan, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced today.

According to a press release issued at Headquarters, the Agency is concentrating on the basic survival of the Tajiks, providing the refugees with the necessary shelter and food in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The returnees are among an estimated 100,000 Tajiks who have fled their villages during the civil war, seeking asylum in the capital city of Dushanbe. They had been given assurances that conditions were right for their return and that food and shelter were awaiting them. But upon their arrival they were prevented from going to their home villages by the local population.

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According to the UNHCR, the international community's response to the United Nations appeal for assistance to Tajikistan has been "lukewarm". So far, the Agency has received pledges of $1.3 million of the $7.9 million it needs until May to provide emergency assistance to the least developed of the former Soviet Republics.

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